

Strauss's Draft for His First Lecture on the *Euthyphro* (1950)

Ad lecture on *Euthyphron*.

The problem of the Platonic dialogue in general:

- a) Plato does not teach in his own name—this is due to the problematic character of teaching: to the essential limitation of teaching: what is that limitation?
- b) the dialogue is meant to overcome this limitation and this obstacle: how does the dialogue achieve this feat?
- c) we have no direct access to Plato's teaching—how can we get an access to it?

Excursus of *Theaetetus*[*us*]: philosopher concerned with the truth, with the nature of things, and in particular with the nature of man, and not with people—he does not even know whether his neighbor is a human being—so much is he preoccupied with finding out what a human being is.

But: Plato imitates people—even his Socrates is amazingly well informed about people—sometimes he almost approaches the character of a gossip. Obviously, Plato considered quest for the truth and concern with people inseparable, although of course distinct—

On this lecture, see the introduction to this volume, p. 6. Comments in square brackets [] are editorial insertions; those in angular brackets < > are notes crossed out by Strauss; those surrounded by superscript ^vs have been

inserted by Strauss on a verso page; those surrounded by superscript ^ps have been inserted by Strauss in pencil; and those marked by a superscript ^R have been underlined by Strauss with red pencil.

[Obviously, Plato considered] theory and practice [inseparable, although of course distinct—]

Theory—knowledge, quest for knowledge

Practice—virtue—“people” → social virtue = justice

→ philosophy and justice are inseparable, although distinct.

While in itself philosophy is primary, πρὸς ἡμᾶς [for us] justice is primary: in every dialogue, S. performs an act of justice (= helping people): he does not in every dialogue embark on a quest for knowledge: what could he learn from Euthyphron? What philosophic truth could he teach Euthyphron? The primacy of justice: philosophy requires a certain preparation, a moral preparation, in fact, a conversion of the whole soul → all Socratic dialogues present this preparation (various stages) or rather they assist us in our preparation: how we can acquire a philosophic attitude—what obstacles we have to overcome in order to become philosophers—from what claims we have to liberate ourselves if we want to become philosophers.

Answer to question a)—the essential limitation of teaching consists in the fact that it cannot be understood without a previous conversion of the whole soul.

Philosophizing presupposes the overcoming of the obstacles to philosophy—i.e., the prejudices nourished by the passions, by our self-assertiveness. The dialogues present these obstacles and also the process in which they can be overcome—

These obstacles cannot be overcome by teaching, by speech—cf. Callicles—a certain φύσις [nature] is required; and they cannot be shaken but by individual measures—by change of the atmosphere as it were.

Answer to question b.

ἐτι [besides]: there are prejudices which ought not to be shaken in most men: καλὸν ψεῦδος [noble lie].

→ the surface of the dialogue (= content) does not transmit Plato's teaching—for his teaching is intelligible only to those who have already undergone the conversion. The explicit “teaching” of S. is rather a means for bringing about this conversion: to serve this purpose, it cannot possibly be simply true.

How then can we get hold of Plato's teaching if that teaching ≠ “content”? Through the “form”—more precisely, through understanding content in the light of the form.

a) Content: doctrine of ideas—the form does not throw light on that. But: idea and ψυχή [soul]—the dialogue presents people in their relation to the truth, i.e., to the ideas—i.e., it presents souls—this presentation (Plato's μίμησις [imitation]) is based on his understanding of the soul → it reveals silently his teaching concerning the soul.

b) λογογραφική ανάγκη [logographic necessity]

Answer to question c). PTO

[please turn over]

E. was a fool—S. a wise man. We cannot help loving S., and the divine Plato—we applaud them. Of course, S. did not believe in the old gods, and he did this of course out of piety. He was a martyr: he was unjustly condemned. The *Euthyphron* illustrates this fact most clearly: it holds up the impiety of those who killed S.

But: the first lesson we ought to have learned from Plato, is never to applaud, never to admire before we have understood. From Plato's point of view it is infinitely better to oppose S. on rational grounds than to be an Apollodorus, the prototype of the caricature Platonist.

“S. did not believe in the old gods—and he did this out of piety”—now, S. is accused of not believing in the old gods, i.e., of not believing in the existence of the old gods: he denied the charge; at least, he evaded it: he did not honestly say that he did not believe in the existence of Zeus, Athena, etc. But a pious man, especially a martyr is supposed to die for the profession of his faith → S. is not a martyr for a higher form of piety. S. did not admit that he was guilty in the sense of the charge: he justified his innocence → he believed in the existence of the old gods: either he believed in the existence of the old gods (and hence was not a representative of the higher form of piety) or he did not believe in their existence (in that case, he was dishonest or polite and hence not a representative of the higher form of piety).

For: to say that he understood “the old gods” in a metaphoric sense, and he believed in them in that metaphoric sense is a dishonest way of saying that he did not believe in the old gods. It is dishonest because it conceals the fact that on his way from the popular notion of gods to the philos[ophic] notion, S. had to commit an act of rejection, of intellectual

iconoclasm: a specious continuity conceals an intransigent and clear decision. S. wanted to awaken people: we do not follow his example, if we use his authority for putting ourselves to sleep.

No result. We do not know what piety is. For all we can see, S. does not know what piety is. But: λόγος [speech] ≠ ἔργον [action]—twofold presentation of piety—a) speech, b) action: action by S. Two questions: a) what is piety? b) was S. pious? Philos[ophic] significance of this historical question: does piety belong to philosopher, to human excellence? // S.'s action.

<S.'s action: he tries to induce E. to abide by the customary practice out of fear of the gods.>

Why then S.'s return to popular notion of piety?

The τόπος [topic/place] of piety—what gives rise to piety? What is its legitimate meaning?

1) ideas → ideas ≠ ἕκαστα [particulars]—dualism → τύχη [chance], uncontrollable: the fact of τύχη [chance] is ultimate justification of piety: τὰ μέγιστα ἐν πράξει [the greatest things in action] do not depend on human power. Piety arises out of recognition of power of τύχη [chance]. But it is connected with an attempt to control τύχη [chance] via the gods—i.e., it refers τύχη [chance] to ἐπιστήμη [knowledge] or τέχνη [art] which is absurd.

The right attitude is to recognize the power of τύχη [chance] and not to attempt to control it: the virtue in question is ἀνδρεία [courage] (steadfastness in the face of ἀτυχίαι [misfortunes] and εὐτυχίαι [good fortunes]: the high place assigned to ἀνδρεία [courage] in *Rep*[ublic].

2) second definition of piety (arrived at with S.'s assistance): ὁσιόν [holy] a part of δίκαιον [just] (the part referring to the gods) → one may be pious without being just to humans and one may be just to humans without being pious.

Now, justice is evidently necessary → piety is superfluous.

Yet: the action shows that piety is not superfluous: S. refers E. to fear of the gods → S. trying to reinforce just action → piety = reinforcement of δίκαιον [just] necessary for those who do not appreciate the claim of justice.

S.'s action

First step: S. makes E. doubtful whether he will win his lawsuit (9a1–c8)—disagreement among gods whether E.'s action is just, but the strongest god is on E.'s side—yet: E. will have to win his lawsuit in Athens: a strong force (a majority) is against him. Piety is ἀνθρώπινον [human].

Second step: this means that his will be considered impious—he will lay himself open to the charge of impiety. In this situation, S. makes E. admit that θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] ≠ ὁσιόν [holy] → θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] = ἀσέβεια [impiety]

Third step: S. suggests the common view of piety: return to εὐσέβεια [piety]: θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] = ὁσιόν [holy].

Fourth step: S. reminds E. of previous discussion that led to “θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] ≠ ὁσιόν [holy]” → E. shall indeed return to customary practice, but he shall do it in realization of his ignorance: for his belief in his wisdom led him astray.

To sum up: S. tries to induce E. to abide by the customary practice out of fear of the gods and fear for his reputation with men—i.e., without knowing a reason of customary practice—E. shall submit to authority.

The issue: is it pious or impious to sue one's own father for the murder of someone who does not belong to one's own family? E.: it is pious. S.: it is impious. S. knows then that a certain action is impious—and yet he does not know what piety is: he is as dogmatic as E.

What is the implicit notion of piety that underlies S.'s action? He emphasizes the fact that the murdered man is a mere menial—can't a menial be better than E.'s father (Meno's παῖς [(slave-)boy])—he refers to an ἔνδοξον [accepted opinion] → piety = to behave toward the gods, the customary gods, in the customary fashion.

This notion of piety underlying the charge against S. → the action of the *Euthyphron* shows, and it is meant to show, that S. was pious in the sense of the charge.

This notion of piety is the most common one, the most obvious one.

In Socratic discussions, the first suggestion of the συνών [companion] frequently is the most obvious notion (*Laches*, *Charmides* etc. ≠ *Rep[ublic]*).

The surprising thing is that E.'s first suggestion is not the most obvious

one. Only after another, less obvious definition has failed, and after some prodding by S. does E. reproduce the most obvious notion. Why? E. deviates from custom—not only in the particular case, but in his very notion of piety. He is a heretic: he does not share the vulgar notion of piety.

Euthyphron continued.

E. is a fool—granted. But he knows more about piety in the traditional sense than the average man: he is an expert in piety. He does not accuse S.—he is friendly toward S.—S. and E. belong together in opposition to Meletus etc. E., the μάντις [diviner], divines, if very dimly, the truth. What then is E's view of piety? He does not state it in his formal definition: he reveals it rather ἔργῳ [in deed] than λόγῳ [in speech]—what is the notion of piety underlying E's action?

5e5–6a3 piety = imitating the gods—imitating what the gods do. This implies a rejection of the popular notion: according to which piety = obeying the gods = doing what the gods command = worshipping the gods (cf. 14b2ff.)

If we identify piety with worshipping the gods, the popular view is: the gods are pleased by worship and obedience → θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] = ὁσιόν [holy].

E. on the other hand asserts implicitly: θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] ≠ ὁσιόν [holy]—the gods are pleased, not by worship and obedience, but by imitation—not by our doing what they say but by our doing what they do.

E. is shocked when S. tries to show him that his definition (θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] = ὁσιόν [holy]) leads to θεοφιλές [dear to the gods] ≠ ὁσιόν [holy]—he wants to stick to the accepted equation—but by his deed he questions that equation.

His implicit reason: imitation is superior to obedience—for it is wiser than obedience or worship—a wise man wants to be imitated rather than to be obeyed or worshipped.

E's folly = half-heartedness: if the right thing is to imitate the gods, piety is not the right thing and the gods are not pious (E. takes as his model Zeus, the justest god ≠ the most pious god) → piety is not a virtue.

There are many gods who hold different views—E. picks the justest god—he knows then what justice is prior to his knowing that Zeus is just.

<→ there is no need for imitating Zeus: imitation of the idea of justice is enough> the just god is just only to the extent to which he complies with, or imitates, the idea of justice: he is subject to the idea of justice; the idea of justice is higher than Zeus. Now, if we know the idea of justice, we do not need to imitate the justest god; it is perfectly sufficient to imitate the idea of justice. Piety = imitating the gods is superfluous. Except: the gods are wise (= have adequate knowledge of the ideas) and we can only strive for wisdom = philosophize—philosophizing = assimilation to the gods = imitation of the gods.

The ideas are the “new gods” of S. // Cf. relation of theology in *Rep*[*ublic*] II with *Rep*[*ublic*] VI–VII.

E.’s heresy, consistently followed up, will lead to S.’s heresy.

What is E.’s *πρῶτον ψεύδος* [first lie]? From the point of view of piety proper, it would seem to consist in the fact that he is disobedient: he picks his god—he chooses Zeus—for: in choosing, E./one must behave rationally: he chooses Zeus as the most just god—he knows what justice is—he does not need Zeus.

How could one pick a god without being forced to admit the ideas? The gods are the old gods—their claim to reverence rests on their oldness → in case of conflict: pick the oldest god: no problem arises.

The oldest god is Uranus → piety = imitating the Heaven (*Tim.* 90c–d). *ἐτι* [besides]—Uranus eats his own children, he destroys the young ones—*διαφθείρειν τοὺς νέους* [corrupting the young]—even on the level of mythology, S. is more consistent than E. But this *ὡς ἐν παρόδῳ* [as it were in passing].

E. is impious from every point of view: from that of Meletus as well as that of S.—and indeed from his own point of view—

Is then the popular view preferable to E.? Is the popular view consistent? Or is E.’s deviation from the popular view not superior to the popular view?

Could one avoid E.’s mistake by remaining within the popular view—by not even thinking of imitating the gods? Piety = to obey and worship the gods according to custom without reasoning why? But why should one worship and obey the gods? Because of their superior power. But

can the gods be powerful if they lack wisdom? This is tacitly admitted by the popular view itself: the gods who are powerful rather than wise, can be controlled by man (by means of sacrifices and prayers) → they are dependent on man. The gods must be wise if they are to be powerful. But if they are wise, they will wish to be imitated rather than to be worshipped. And: if they are wise, they are wise by knowledge, i.e., knowledge of the ideas—and hence the highest beings are, not the gods, but the ideas.

The vulgar view is untenable, it is absurd. Yet it is not an arbitrary invention: it is a necessary consequence of the denial of the ideas. Ultimately, there exists only this alternative: doctrine of ideas or absurdities of mythology.

Why? Let us assume the highest beings are, not ideas, but persons—not universals, but individuals—or even one individual—an individual bearing a name (a Thou)—but a being bears a name in order to be distinguished from other individuals of the same class → polytheism.

The being in question will not be subject to higher norm—their rule of action will be their arbitrary will—they would not be guided by knowledge—they will be ignorant—they would fight—they would be unjust, intemperate, etc.

Occam: primacy of will and yet monotheism—God could command murder—his absolute freedom—(but if he is absolutely free, he could create other gods → polytheism → fight—or: commit suicide and decree that atheistic universe will last forever—)

either: primacy of intelligible necessity ruling the universe or absurdity.

(the modern alternative: intelligible necessity created by man → Thing-in-itself.)

Note

1. Using the phrase "Continuation 2," Strauss inserted here the following two paragraphs (up to "shall submit to authority"), which are written on a separate sheet.